

Service, Room 5571, 1111 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20224.

*OMB Reviewer:* Milo Sunderhauf, (202) 395-7340, Office of Management and Budget, Room 10226, New Executive Office Building, Washington, DC 20503.

**Lois K. Holland,**

*Departmental Reports Management Officer.*

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## UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

### Office of Citizens Exchange; NIS Secondary School Initiative; Secondary School Linkage Program

**ACTION:** Notice; Request for proposals.

**SUMMARY:** The Office of Citizen Exchanges, Division of the NIS Secondary School Initiative, of the United States Information Agency's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces an open competition for an assistance award to conduct exchanges through the multiple secondary school linkage program with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. Public or private non-profit organizations meeting the provisions described in IRS regulation 26 CFR 1.501(c) (3)-1 apply either to enhance/expand existing linkages or to develop new school linkage programs. All submissions must contain a Student exchange component AND an Educator (teacher and/or administrator) exchange component. For previous school link grant recipients, a minimum of twenty-five percent of the proposed linkages must not have been previously supported by USIA. USIA grant funds may not be used for student or teacher exchanges located in the cities of Moscow or St. Petersburg, Russia. The maximum grant award will be \$800,000.

Overall grant making authority for this program is contained in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, Public Law 87-256, as amended, also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The purpose of the Act is "to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries \* \* \*; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations \* \* \* and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic

and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world."

The funding authority for the program cited above was originally provided through the FREEDOM Support Act of 1992. Grants awarded by the solicitation are subject to the availability of funding for the Fiscal Year 1996 program. Programs and projects must conform with Agency requirements and guidelines outlined in the Solicitation Package.

**ANNOUNCEMENT TITLE AND NUMBER:** All communications with USIA concerning this announcement should refer to the above title and reference number E/P-96-14.

**DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS:** All copies must be received at the U.S. Information Agency by 5 p.m. Washington, D.C. time on Friday, November 17, 1995. Faxed documents will not be accepted, nor will documents postmarked November 17 but received at a later date. It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure that proposals are received by the above deadline. Subject to the availability of funding grants will be awarded February 1, 1996 for programs to begin after June 1, 1996.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** NIS Secondary School Division, E/PY, Room 320, U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20547, telephone: (202) 619-6299; Fax: (202) 619-5311; e-mail nfeigenb@usia.gov to request a Solicitation Package, which includes more detailed award criteria, all application forms, and guidelines for preparing proposals, including specific questions or concerns regarding the solicitation, contact USIA Program Officer Naomi Feigenbaum. Interested applicants should read the complete Federal Register announcement before addressing inquiries to the USIA or submitting their proposals. Once the RFP deadline has passed, representatives of USIA and the Division of NIS Secondary School Initiative may not discuss this competition in any way with applicants until after the Bureau proposal review process has been completed.

**SUBMISSIONS:** Applicants must follow all instructions given in the Solicitation Package. The original and 10 copies of the complete application should be sent to: U.S. Information Agency Ref.: E/P-96-14 Office of Grants Management, E/XE, Room 326, 301 4th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20547.

Applicants must also submit the "Executive Summary" and "Proposal Narrative" sections of the proposal on a 3.5" diskette, formatted for DOS. This

material must be provided in ASCII text (DOS) format with a maximum line length of 65 characters. USIA will transmit these files electronically to USIA posts overseas for their review, with the goal of reducing the time it takes to get posts' comments for the Agency's grants review process.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Pursuant to the Bureau's authorizing legislation, programs must maintain a non-political character and should be balanced and representative of the diversity of American political, social, and cultural life. "Diversity" should be interpreted in the broadest sense and encompass differences including but not limited to race, gender, religion, geographic location, socio-economic status, and physical challenges. Applicants are strongly encouraged to adhere to the advancement of this principle.

### Overview: (Background, Objectives)

The short-term goal of the school linkage program is to provide partial funding for linkages between U.S. and NIS schools featuring student and educator exchanges for the purpose of collaborative substantive projects. Grant funded exchanges must have a thematic focus and have tangible outcomes (e.g. educational materials). The long term goals are to:

- (1) to advance mutual understanding between the U.S. and the NIS;
- (2) develop lasting institutional ties between U.S. and NIS schools and communities;
- (3) promote U.S. government/private sector cooperation by supporting linkages which hold promise for sustainability beyond the grant term and serve the needs and interests of the schools.

The linkages between networks of secondary schools in the U.S. with networks of schools in the NIS must establish ties between the schools in the network through two sets of exchange programs (1) the exchange of secondary school educators between the U.S. and NIS countries; (2) the exchange of secondary school students, from 14 to 18 years of age, between the U.S. and participating NIS countries.

### Guidelines

USIA funding may not be used to supplant existing private sector funding. Applicants must indicate how activities have been funded in the past and how the activities will be expanded with assistance from USIA. The U.S. recipient of the grant is responsible for recruiting/selecting/organizing a minimum of three U.S. secondary schools to form the U.S. network, strengthening an existing working

relationship with an organization or agency of government in the NIS responsible for a network of schools there, and linking the two networks through substantive exchange activities.

Partnerships should have an existence beyond the scope of this initiative; that is, there should be an inherent reason for their linkage apart from the availability of grant funds. Competitive proposals will demonstrate the linkage and the types of activities (follow-on) to continue after the grant has expired. An ideal project builds upon previous contacts and interaction between the proposed networks to help ensure a solid foundation for the linkage. The U.S. school should collaborate with the NIS school in planning and preparation.

Proposals should support a working relationship that will produce something tangible, necessary and of lasting value to both sides, beyond the confines of the exchange. The proposal should specify up front what the measurable results of the program will be. Proposal must include a statement of goals and objectives prepared by school representatives for each separate school linkage.

When planning the project, U.S. and NIS schools are strongly encouraged to consult with the Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) or Public Affairs Officer (PAO) at the appropriate U.S. Information Service (USIS) office at the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Consulate in the appropriate country.

The U.S. recipient of the grant will: design the overall plan that integrates the two components of the linkage, ensure quality control for all program elements, manage all travel arrangements, logistics, passports, visas, etc., provide competent and informed escorts for student groups, and disburse and account for grant funds.

Recipients of the assistance award are responsible for ensuring the selection of exchange participants who are most suited for the program. Participants (both Educators and Students) from the U.S. and NIS countries should represent a diversity of backgrounds to give greater understanding to the culture and society as a whole. Selection of individual participants from the U.S. and NIS in the exchange components of the program must be merit-based; the proposal should describe the mechanisms used for participant selection.

Applicants should be familiar with the "General Provisions" of J-1 visa regulations. The Agency will process the IAP-66 forms for travel to the U.S. Basic health and accident insurance coverage of exchange participants while they are on exchange will be covered by USIA. Those organizations wishing to

use other types of insurance coverage must provide a satisfactory justification as to why their coverage is more effective. Please refer to the Program Objectives, Goals, and Implementation section of the Solicitation Package for greater detail regarding the design of the component parts as well as other program information.

#### *Proposed Budget*

Awards may not exceed \$800,000. Applicants must submit a comprehensive budget for the entire program. There must be a summary budget as well as a break-down reflecting both the administrative budget and the program budget. All program costs should clearly indicate whether they cover U.S. and NIS participants. The cost per NIS student, NIS educator, U.S. student, U.S. educator should be listed separately. Cost-sharing is strongly encouraged and will be viewed favorably in weighing the merits of the proposal.

Grants awarded to eligible organizations with fewer than four years of experience in conducting international exchange programs will be limited to \$60,000.

Please refer to the POGI and Proposal Submission Instructions sections of the Solicitation Package for complete budget guidelines and format instructions.

#### **Review Process**

USIA will acknowledge receipt of all proposals and will review them for technical eligibility. Proposals will be deemed ineligible if they do not fully adhere to the guidelines stated herein and in the Solicitation Package. Eligible proposals will be forwarded to panels of USIA officers for advisory review. All eligible proposals also will be reviewed by the Agency contracts office, as well as the pertinent USIA area office and the USIA post overseas, where appropriate. Proposals may be reviewed by the Office of the General Counsel or by other Agency elements. Funding decisions are at the discretion of the USIA Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Final technical authority for grant awards resides with the USIA grants officer.

#### **Review Criteria**

Technically eligible applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria stated below. These criteria are not rank ordered and all carry equal weight in the proposal evaluation:

1. Quality of the program idea: Proposals should exhibit originality, substance (particularly in academic/educational aspects), precision, and

relevance to the stated goals of the program.

2. Program planning: Detailed agenda and relevant work plan should demonstrate substantive undertakings and logistical capacity. Agenda and plan should adhere to the program overview and guidelines described above.

3. Ability to achieve program objectives: Objectives should be reasonable, feasible, and flexible. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the institution will meet the program's objectives and plan.

4. Multiplier effect/impact: Proposed programs should strengthen long-term mutual understanding, including maximum sharing of information and establishment of long-term individual and institutional linkages.

5. Support of Diversity: Proposals should demonstrate the recipient's commitment to promoting the awareness and understanding of diversity.

6. Institutional Capacity: Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program or project's goals.

7. Institution's Record/Ability: Proposals should demonstrate an institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Agency grants as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts. The Agency will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants. Track record will be evaluated by achievement of stated goals and impact on schools in the U.S. and NIS.

8. Follow-on Activities: Proposals should provide a plan for continued follow-on activity (without USIA support) that ensures that USIA-supported programs are not isolated events. Proposal should demonstrate how activity will contribute to institution-building in the NIS.

9. Project Evaluation: Proposals should include a plan to evaluate the program, both as the activities unfold and at the end. THEY SHOULD INCLUDE GOALS FOR EACH SCHOOL LINKAGE AND HOW THEIR ATTAINMENT WILL BE MEASURED. USIA recommends that the proposal include a draft survey questionnaire or other technique plus description of a methodology for use in linking outcomes to original project objectives for each school linkage. Award-receiving organizations/institutions will be expected to submit reports on each separate linkage.

10. Cost-effectiveness: The overhead and administrative components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and appropriate.

11. Cost-sharing: Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through participant contributions, other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions.

12. Value to U.S.-Partner Country Relations: Proposed projects will be reviewed by USIA's geographic area desk officer and overseas officers to assess the relevance to program need, potential impact, and significance in the partner country(ies).

13. Selection Process: Proposals should provide a specific plan to ensure a selection based on merit and should include detailed criteria for selection of U.S. and NIS teacher and administrator as well as U.S. and NIS student participants.

#### Notice

The terms and conditions published in this RFP are binding and may not be modified by any USIA representative. Explanatory information provided by the Agency that contradicts published language will not be binding. Issuance of the RFP does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government. The Agency reserves the right to reduce, revise, or increase

proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program. Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal USIA procedures.

#### Notification

All applicants will be notified of the results of the review process on or about April 1, 1996. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements.

Dated: August 14, 1995.

#### Dell Pendergrast,

*Deputy Associate Director, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.*

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